

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 16539

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR

SUBJECT: VIKTOR LOUIS ON SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: (A) STATE 255339 (NOTAL), (B) LONDON 16633 (NOTAL),
(C) MOSCOW 16203

1. SUMMARY. THE TWO PUBLISHED VERSIONS OF VIKTOR LOUIS' ARTICLE ON SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS CONVEY TOTALLY OPPOSITE IMPRESSIONS. IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION, LOUIS CONFIRMED THAT THE HARSHER LINE WAS WHAT HE INTENDED BUT CLAIMED THAT HE WAS MERELY INDULGING IN PRESS "SPECULATION" AND WAS NOT "THREATENING" PEKING. HE CLAIMED THAT MOSCOW'S TIME LIMIT FOR A CHINESE RESPONSE WAS NOT LITERALLY "ONE MONTH" AS THE FRENCH VERSION OF THE STORY SAYS (REF A), BUT HE REITERATED THAT SOVIET PATIENCE WAS NOT INFINITE. A PRC EMBOFF SEES THE ARTICLE AS A MORE OPEN INDICATION THAT SOVIET POLICY HAS NOT CHANGED AND WILL NOT. OUR
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ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE FULLER VERSION OF THE LOUIS

ARTICLE PROBABLY REVEALS TWO KEY POINTS IN MOSCOW'S CURRENT APPROACH TO CHINA: TO PORTRAY ITSELF AS THE AGGRIEVED PARTY TO THE DISPUTE AND TO GIVE THOSE SOVIETS WHO ARGUE FOR A SOFTER LINE ROPE TO HANG THEMSELVES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EARLIER VERSION OF THE LOUIS STORY, CARRIED IN THE LONDON EVENING NEWS ON OCTOBER 12 (REF B), STRESSES THE POSITIVE SOVIET REACTION TO THE REPORTED PURGES OF THE RADICALS IN PEKING, AND APPEALS TO THOSE CHINESE "MILITARY LEADERS" (WHO, LOUIS SAYS, HAD BLAMED MAO FOR BAD SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS) TO "RAISE THEIR VOICES". THE FRENCH VERSION OF THE ARTICLE, CARRIED IN FRANCE SOIR OCT. 14 (REF A) CONTAINS THE SAME POINTS, BUT GOES ON TO SAY THAT THIS IS CHINA'S "LAST CHANCE" TO SEEK A RAPPROCHEMENT BEFORE THE SOVIETS MADE "AN IRREVERSIBLE DECISION." LOUIS CONCLUDES THAT THE SOVIETS WHO ADVOCATED A "WAIT AND SEE" ATTITUDE WERE EVEN NOW IN A "VERY SMALL MINORITY." THE EFFECT OF THE WHOLE ARTICLE (THE FRANCE SOIR VERSION) IS TO REVERSE THE APPROVAL VOICED THE FIRST HALF AND TO REPLACE IT WITH AN ULTIMATUM.

3. IN A LONG PRIVATE CONVERSATION ON OCT. 17, ACTING POLCONS ASKED LOUIS WHAT EFFECT HE INTENDED ARTICLE TO HAVE. LOUIS REACTED DEFENSIVELY, SAYING THAT IT WAS HIS RIGHT AS A JOURNALIST TO SPECULATE AS HE SAW FIT (SEE REF C). WHILE DISAVOWING THE "LAST CHANCE" HEADING (INSERTED BY FRANCE SOIR, HE SAID), HE THEN VIRTUALLY REPEATED THE MAIN POINTS OF THE ARTICLE, ESPECIALLY THE SECOND HALF, STRESSING THE PATIENCE OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND ITS WILLINGNESS TO GIVE A HEARING TO THOSE WHO STILL CLING TO THE BELIEF THAT THE CHINESE THEY HAD KNOWN MUST HARBOR SOME FRIENDLY FEELINGS TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. LOUIS CLEARLY DID NOT NUMBER HIMSELF AMONG THOSE "SOFTIES" AND INDICATED THAT THE KREMLIN'S PATIENCE WITH THEIR APPROACH WAS BORN BOTH OF DOUBT ABOUT WHAT REALLY IS HAPPENING IN CHINA AND OF THE NEED TO SHOW FOR THE RECORD A CLEAR SOVIET ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE CONFRONTATION.

4. LOUIS CONTINUED THAT AS A PRACTICAL MATTER THE SOVIETS
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DO NOT EXPECT THE CHINESE TO RESPOND, BUT THAT THEY WANTED THE NEW CHINESE LEADERS TO BE REMINDED BOTH OF THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND THE POTENTIAL COSTS OF THEIR POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. HE SAID THAT A RETURN TO THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE '50'S WAS CLEARLY OUT OF THE QUESTION, BUT MOSCOW COULD ENVISION A RELATIONSHIP LIKE IT HAS WITH INDIA.

5. ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE, LOUIS POINTED OUT (AS HE

HAD EARLIER, REF C) THAT THERE ARE "MANY" PEOPLE FROM SINKIANG NOW LIVING IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ISTANBUL WHO ARE "EAGER" TO ACT IN SUPPORT OF THEIR KINSMEN ON THE PRC SIDE OF THE BORDER. HE HAS HIMSELF MET WITH "LEADERS" NOW LIVING IN TASHKENT AND ISTANBUL, LOUIS SAID. THESE PEOPLE ARE OF ONE MIND, HE ASSERTED, AND HAVE NO SYMPATHY FOR THE CHINESE. IN ADDITION, LOUIS SAID, THERE ARE NOW MORE "YELLOW ORDER" BUDDHISTS IN THE USSR THAN IN TIBET, AND THOSE IN MONGOLIA ARE ALSO SYMPATHETIC. IF A SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT COMES, SAID LOUIS, THE SOVIETS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS COULD "EASILY" OCCUPY UP TO ONE-HALF OF THE TERRITORY OF THE PRC. FURTHERMORE, THEY COULD CREATE A "CLEAR ZONE" ALL ALONG THE BORDER WITH TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. MAKING MORE EXPLICIT HIS HINT OF POSSIBLE SOVIET SUBVERSION, LOUIS ASSERTED THAT THE U.S. WOULD NEVER TOLERATE A HOSTILE REGIME IN CANADA OR MEXICO. LOUIS ADDED THAT HE HAS WRITTEN A BOOK ON CHINA, BUT "NO ONE WILL PUBLISH IT" BECAUSE THEY CONSIDER IT "TOO HOSTILE."

6. EMBOFF LUNCHEDED WITH THREE PRC EMBOFFS ON OCT. 18 (AT BRITISH INVITATION). MOST AUTHORITATIVE OF GROUP WAS LI FENG-LIN, WHO IS SOON TO BECOME CHIEF OF THE POLITICAL SECTION (WITH THE DEPARTURE FOR HOME OF THE PRESENT CHIEF, LIU KUANG-CHIH). LI SAID HE HAD SEEN THE LOUIS ARTICLE(S) AND BELIEVED THAT IT SHOWED MORE CLEARLY THAT SOVIET POLICY HAD NOT CHANGED AND WOULD NOT. THE ARTICLE WAS A BALD APPEAL TO SUPPOSED PRO-SOVIETS IN PEKING, BUT THERE ARE NONE, LI ASSERTED. THIS APPEAL WAS FOLLOWED BY THE THREAT OF CERTAIN UNSPECIFIED CONSEQUENCES IF THE CHINESE DID NOT DO MOSCOW'S BIDDING. "WHY IS IT ALWAYS WE WHO MUST CHANGE," LI ASKED, ADDING THAT THE EFFECT OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA

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IS TO SHOW THAT CHINA IS IN THE WRONG. THIS IS NOT THE LANGUAGE OF COMPROMISE, HE SAID, AND LOUIS IS A WELL-KNOWN VOICE FOR BLACK SOVIET PROPAGANDA. EVEN THE ALEKSANDROV ARTICLE (SEE MOSCOW 15536) CLEARLY BLAMED THE CHINESE FOR THE PRESENT IMPASSE, SAID LI, AND DID NOT DEAL AT ALL WITH THE CENTRAL ISSUE, NAMELY THE BORDER. BY SPEAKING OF "UNCONDIDITONAL" TALKS, THE ARTICLE STILL REJECTS THE UNDERSTANDING REACHED BETWEEN PREMIERS CHOU AND KOSYGIN IN 1969. THE ALEKSANDROV ARTICLE, LI CONCLUDED, LOOKED TO THE PAST, PAINTING A FALSE PICTURE OF PERSISTENT SOVIET EFFORTS BUT OFFERING NOTHING FOR THE PRESENT OR FUTURE.

7. COMMENT: LOUIS' ARTICLE AND PRIVATE COMMENTS MAKE HIS OWN POSITION ABUNDANTLY CLEAR, AND WE ASSUME THAT HE SPEAKS WITH SOME AUTHORITY ABOUT AT LEAST SOME SOVIET

LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES. HE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT ONE OF MOSCOW'S MOTIVES IS TO PORTRAY ITSELF CONSISTENTLY READY FOR BETTER RELATIONS, AND THEREFORE AS THE AGGRIEVED PARTY IN THE DISPUTE. BUT EVEN STRONGER IS THE THREAT OF CONSEQUENCES IF PEKING DOES NOT TAKE THE PROFFERED HAND SOON. THE EFFECT OF THE SECOND POINT, IN OUR VIEW, IS TO TELL THOSE SOVIETS WHO ADVOCATE PATIENCE THAT IF THEIR APPROACH DOES NOT PRODUCE RESULTS, THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES WHOSE IMPLEMENTATION WILL ISOLATE THEM. IN OTHER WORDS, BY FOLLOWING THEIR (MINORITY) VIEW NOW, THE SOVIETS MAY BE BUILDING A CASE FOR REPUDIATING IT (AND THEM) IF NO QUICK IMPROVEMENT RESULTS. MATLOCK

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